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ROLFF'S HOUSE

BY G. H. BENEDICT.

There was good reason for his surprise. The face and form of the young man in roller attire were those of Claude Rolff.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
An embarrassing silence followed Claude Rolff's abrupt and unexpected appearance in lawyer Saybrook's office. Claude was the first to break the spell that his presence seemed to have produced.

With your permission, I will take a chair," he said. "I have travelled far, and am not well."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," replied the lawyer, rousing himself with an effort.

Claude sat down in a chair near the door.

Ralph meanwhile was beating a tattoo with his fingers on the desk near which he had taken his seat, while he eyed Claude with a scowling and rather rueful countenance.

The lawyer had apparently sunk back into the stupor of surprise which Claude's first entrance had caused him; but, in fact, all his wits were at work in considering how to meet this unexpected emergency.

Claude saw that it was necessary for him to open the conversation. "An opportunity being offered me to return home on a privateer," he said, "I thought it well to embrace it as I felt keenly the pang of being separated from my native land in the hour of her peril. I was hurt in an engagement with an enemy's vessel on our return voyage, and am probably in no condition to transact much business—still, there are some matters which I deem it important to seek the earliest possible explanation of."

"Oh, of course," replied the lawyer, smiling from habit, but still speaking in rather an embarrassed way. "M-m-m—yes—happy to explain anything. Very agreeable surprise, my dear sir; wasn't expecting your return. I—m-m—m—I—in fact, I'm very agreeably surprised. I—I—by the way, won't you allow me, my dear young sir, under the happy circumstances, to set out a little wine and drink to your safe return before proceeding to any business."

The lawyer arose, and bustled with a hospitable air that enabled him to conceal his embarrassment.

"No, no, I thank you," responded Claude, to his invitation. "I shall be obliged to decline, as I am disposed to be a little feverish, and I am afraid any stimulant would be bad for me. Pray don't trouble yourself, Mr. Saybrook."

But the lawyer, nevertheless, brought out bottle and glasses, and poured out three bumpers, offering Claude one which he again declined. The father and son tossed their glasses off, however, and the former resumed his seat, having recovered in a measure his usual collected and wary demeanor.

Claude, after waiting a moment, said, "I will state at once, frankly, Mr. Saybrook, that I do not come in a very friendly mood. Some very strange rumors have come to my ears, which hardly seem credible, it is true, but which certainly justify me in demanding an explanation. If true, they brand you with treachery and fraud in the conduct of my business. Of course, I have held my own judgment on the matter in suspense until giving you an opportunity to explain. I must state, however, that I am clear up all my doubts satisfactorily."

"To what do you refer?" inquired the lawyer, in bland tones that indicated that he had entirely regained his self-possession.

"I refer," responded Claude, "to the statements current here in this village that you have taken possession of Rolff House and a portion of the adjoining property under authority of deeds purporting to be given by me. I need not remind you that I gave no such deeds, and that there is no possible chance for there to be any misunderstanding on the point that it was my wish, most distinctly expressed, to place no incumbrance whatever on Rolff House, or any of the homestead property, or to imperil my possession of it in any way. You probably can inform me whether the rumors I have heard are true."

"Well, really, my dear sir," replied the lawyer, rubbing his hands and smiling as pleasantly as possible. "I do not exactly comprehend your meaning. You are aware, of course, that a number of papers were drawn and signed by you, intended to secure me for moneys loaned you, some of which moneys I was forced to borrow. Among these securities, were certainly two deeds, which received your signature in due form, and are properly witnessed, and which I have doubtless treated somewhat differently from what you expected, owing to the fact that I supposed circumstances had rendered your return home for a series of years exceedingly problematical. These deeds were intended, of course, only as collateral security, and I never had any idea of using them until the outbreak of war rendered your return uncertain and the impossibility of securing anybody to remain in Rolff House called for some disposition of the property. Under the circumstances, I placed the deeds on record, and am nominally the owner of the property in question, but of course I consider myself bound as a man of honor to keep the matter open for a satisfactory adjustment if we can come to amicable terms."

"I confess I do not understand you," replied Claude. "I wish to state, with the utmost distinctness, that I signed no deeds by way of collateral security or for any other purpose, and that if any such deeds are in existence they are fraudulent. My instructions were explicit, and our understanding complete, that there was to be no mortgage, incumbrance or obligation whatever relating to Rolff House."

"Ah, my dear young friend," replied the lawyer, still maintaining his smiling and unobtrusive mien. "I was forced to

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hair suspicious at the time of our business arrangements that you did not understand all the details we entered into. You left all the arrangements pretty much in my hands, and expressed your willingness to be governed by my judgment—in fact, a thought you were far too careless of your interests. Of course, left to act almost entirely on my own judgment, I drew up such papers as I considered wise and necessary in the matter, and you signed them. I am quite confident you did not critically examine all the papers you signed. It is well, perhaps, for you to remember this fact, before procuring any papers that may be in existence fraudulent. It might be difficult for you to disprove your own signature."

"What I mean," replied Claude, "is that I expressly informed you that Rolff House was not to be included in any of the transactions, and you could not have mistaken me in the matter. If you took advantage of my confidence in you to disobey my instructions and deceive me in the nature of the papers you signed, the fraud is not less for being a cunning instead of a bold one. Now, sir, I wish only to be informed if you claim to have deeds covering Rolff House and the adjoining estate."

"I do, most certainly," replied the lawyer. "And I will add that they are regularly drawn, and duly signed and witnessed. Still, as said—"

"That is enough," replied Claude, flushing with indignation. "I do not feel able to-day to discuss this matter further. You will next hear from me, most probably, through my counsel."

"You mean war?" asked the lawyer. "I do—if it is necessary to assert my rights."

"Before proceeding to extreme measures, it might be well to more fully understand your position," said the lawyer.

Claude did not reply. Making a low bow, he withdrew.

Lawyer Saybrook rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied manner as he turned to Ralph, and said:

"I fancy I bluffed him pretty neatly, Ralph."

"Yes, very nicely," drawled the son. "We have got to fight this out, Ralph," continued the lawyer, "that is, unless we can intimidate the young fool and come to a satisfactory arrangement."

"Exactly," responded Ralph. "He can't bother us much. I am satisfied of it," continued the lawyer; "still, his coming now is very awkward for us. I am particularly concerned on your relations with Rosa. I am afraid it will have a bad influence on the girl. Still, we must not give up the battle yet. Our case, I maintain, is a strong one."

"I should hope not," responded Ralph. "I am too much interested in the young lady to be willing to give her up. I would prefer to reason to the most extreme measures rather than give her up."

"As we will, Ralph, so we will," replied the lawyer.

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pled the father. "Leave that to me. The longest head is bound to win. We will see who has got it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was the third day after his arrival home before Claude made any effort to see Rosa. He well understood the nature of old farmer Bruyn's feelings toward him, as he had been fully informed of the situation in Rosa's letter and from old Carl's statements since his return.

Claude had arrived home in the evening, having come by stage to a neighboring town, and then, in his anxiety to reach home, taken to the saddle from there. He went at once to the humble domicile occupied by Carl Crum, and was heartily greeted by that worthy old fellow. After a good night's rest, he had spent the morning in hearing from old Carl a full account of all that had passed during his absence, and in the afternoon had come to lawyer Saybrook's office and in the interview detailed in the last chapter. It appears that he had not received the letter dispatched to him by Rosa and old Carl by the hands of the privateer sailor, Philip of British descent, that were bruited in Europe, and resolved if possible to give his services to his country in her hour of need, he had taken passage for home in the manner and with the results before described.

Claude was exceedingly anxious to see Rosa, but very much perplexed how to gratify his wish without injury to his self-respect. He understood well enough that the old farmer would be decidedly opposed to his having any interview with her, and he felt scruples as to his right to use any influence to induce her to disobey her father's wishes in any way. But if "love laughs at lock-smiths," it certainly has a way of overcoming lesser obstacles, and Claude soon resolved in his mind to send a note to Rosa by old Carl, asking her to meet him in the old wood, at their trusting place, at a certain hour, provided first that she secured the consent of her mother to the interview. In this way he felt that he had compromised with his conscience to a sufficient degree, and at the same time would secure his object, as he remembered that he had been a favorite with Mrs. Bruyn, and did not doubt that she would readily consent to the interview.

In response to his note, he received a tender and brief epistle from Rosa, telling him that her mother had consented to the interview, but only on condition that she accompanied her and was present. Claude could not well object to this arrangement, spite of his anxiety to meet Rosa alone and have a full explanation and understanding in regard to the obstacles that had been thrown into the pathway of their love.

A little before the hour he proceeded to the appointed place, and had not long to wait ere Rosa and her mother appeared. Claude's bearing was so courteous and sincere, that it at once dispelled any prejudice against him that might have been excited in Mrs. Bruyn's mind. And, withal, he looked so handsome, and his evident suffering condition so appealed to the sympathies of the good lady's womanly heart, that it was well for him that she had chosen to be present at the interview.

Claude first greeted Mrs. Bruyn, and then taking Rosa's hand pressed it to his lips. Not a word was said by either, but their eyes told the tale of mutual distress and longing during the months of their separation.

Claude's story was soon told.

To be Continued.

European Flags.

The yellow and red Spanish flag is the oldest now in use by any European power, yet it was not flown till 1785. The French tricolor came into use ten years later and England's red ensign in 1801.

Buddha's Tooth.

In a temple in India there is preserved and worshipped a tooth claimed to have once been in the jaw of Buddha.

Cape Colony Earthworms.

Cape Colony is the natural habitat of the largest known species of earthworm. It is a soft, scaleless thing between six and seven feet long and much resembles our common angle-worm.

Porson.

Porson, the great Latinist, was the son of a weaver. His taste for learning was kindled by the accidental discovery of a book of Latin proverbs.

A City of Marble.

Modern Athens is a city of marble. Many of the dwellings and business houses and nearly all the public edifices are of that material, and the sidewalks of some of the streets are paved with it.

The Tallest Tree.

At Dundonag, Australia, there is a blue gum tree which has an estimated height of 450 feet. It is believed to be the tallest tree in the world.

Attar of Roses.

One can make attar of roses very simply. Take the flowers of the hundred leaved rose, put in a large jar or cask and just enough water to cover them and stand in the sun. In about a week there will form a scum which can be removed with a piece of cotton.

African Baboons.

In some parts of South Africa much damage is done by baboons, which go in large marauding parties to rob gardens.

Elasticity of Glass.

Glass is the most perfectly elastic substance in existence. A glass plate kept under pressure in a bent condition for twenty-five years will return to its exact original form. Steel comes next in elasticity.

God sees heroes where man sees only the commonplace kind of people.

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Gentlemen!!!

You will agree with me, I think, At once when I admit That water is a splendid drink— For those who're fond of it! And yet, unless I greatly err, There may be times, old chap, When you and I, would much prefer A "Club" Old Tom night cap.

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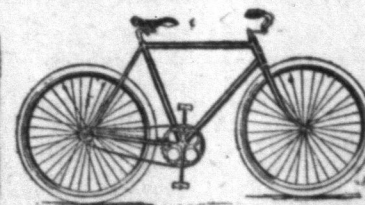
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